

# DRAFT Downtown Parking Report



Amherst Planning Department

June 15, 2015

# Executive Summary

The goal and purpose of this report is to provide a detailed summary of the parking forums held in 2014 and 2015, and to provide a set of strategies and recommendations for the Select Board and Planning Board related to parking in downtown Amherst.

The Report includes a summary of the information provided and received during each forum. It identifies the results of the prioritization exercise of the third forum and identifies and outlines a preliminary set of strategies and recommendations. The Report will include appendices of all the data collected and resources provided and referenced in the report, identified during the forums, or that provide insight, and the Report will reference and incorporate the parking-related sections of the recently completed Transportation Plan.

The Report identifies that the Town should pursue two separate tracks with regard to addressing parking issues related to the downtown (each of which would involve separate processes and timelines but could occur together):

1. Begin a planning process to explore the need for and feasibility of a new parking facility
2. Undertake strategies and efforts to maximize the efficiency and availability of existing parking supply.

It is intended that this Report will be used by the Select Board, Planning Board, and community in taking steps to evaluate the existing parking system, supply, and options for improving or expanding the availability and predictability of parking downtown.

## Acknowledgments

### *Select Board*

Aaron Hayden (former Chair)

Alisa Brewer (Chair)

Constance Kruger

Douglas Slaughter

Andrew Steinberg

James Wald

OTHERS

### *Planning Board*

David Webber (Chair)

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# Introduction

In September of 2014 a series of forums related to parking in downtown Amherst were announced. The series, co-sponsored by the Select Board and Planning Board and hosted by the Planning Department, was intended to begin a dialogue and broad community planning process about parking downtown.

The impetus for starting the discussion was two-fold:

1. Beginning in the Fall of 2012 the downtown began to see new development with the application and approval of Kendrick Place by the Planning Board and later in the Spring of 2014 the approval of One East Pleasant Street. Subsequent to the approval of Kendrick Place, some residents and business owners expressed surprise and confusion that a project would be approved without requiring parking on-site. The lack of knowledge by some of the existence of, or purpose and intent of, the Municipal Parking District was a cause for concern amongst the Planning Board and Town staff. In fact, the Zoning Subcommittee of the Planning Board considered reviewing the MPD requirements at that time, but realized that parking downtown is a complex interconnected system and a more comprehensive review would be more appropriate. The concerns, questions, and interest in parking downtown provided an opportunity to initiate a community discussion.
2. In August 2014, the Executive Office of Housing and Urban Development announced a new grant funding source of \$1,000,000 for communities to “study and implement parking management plans that require the development of demand-based parking to meet the needs of visitor populations on a daily basis”. This type of inventory, data, and evaluation would have provided the Town with valuable baseline information about the current parking supply and demand. (Unfortunately, however, in February 2015, the Baker Administration announced budget cuts which included the entire funding source for communities to study parking).

It was this combination of the concerns, questions, and interest in parking downtown and the possibility for the Town to receive grant funding to obtain an updated inventory, to study and create a management strategy based on current supply and demand which created the prime opportunity to engage the members of the public and business community through a forum process.

ADDITIONAL TEXT

# Chapter 1 – Parking Forum One

September 23, 2014

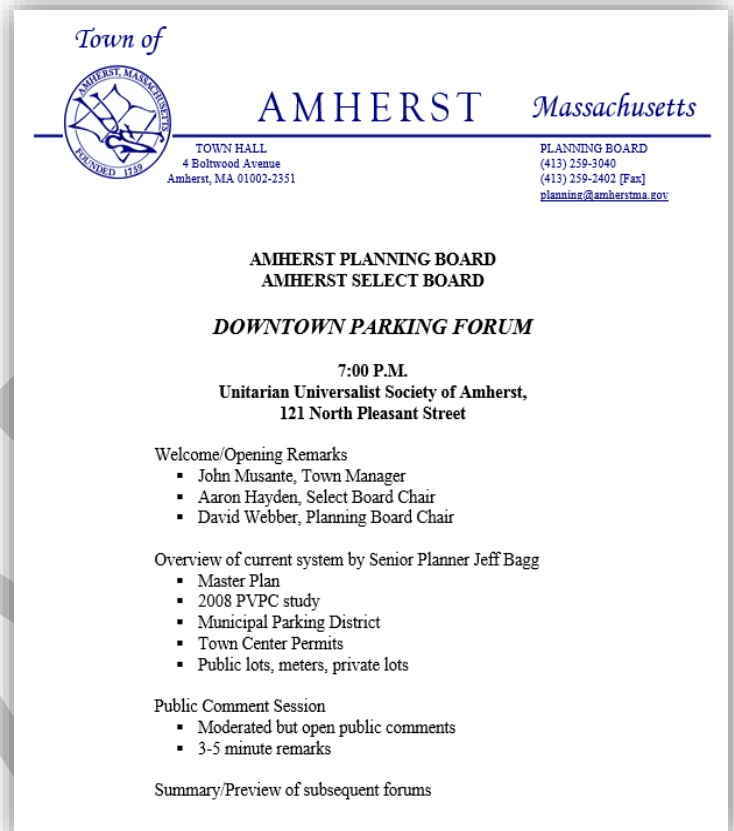
The first in a series of community forums related to downtown parking, co-sponsored by the Select Board and Planning Board, was held on September 23, 2014 at the newly renovated meeting room at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst. The purpose of the first forum was to begin a broader community planning process by providing a basic overview of the current parking system and to provide an opportunity for public comment. The forum was facilitated by Senior Planner Jeff Bagg.

The first part of the forum described the components of the current parking system, including a review of the Master Plan as it relates to parking, the Municipal Parking District, and the Town Center Permit system. The second part of the forum provided a platform for residents, business owners, and others to identify issues and concerns, ask questions, make comments, or offer potential solutions. The goal of the public comment session was not to provide immediate answers or responses; rather, it was to record, catalog, and compile the comments.

A comprehensive new webpage ([www.amherstma.gov/parkingforum](http://www.amherstma.gov/parkingforum)) was prepared and was dedicated to providing complete copies of historical information and studies, as well as updated information in response to the community planning process, including the video of the forum along with notes collected. The webpage also provided an opportunity for comments to be submitted online. The intent was to hold subsequent forums to present a summary of the issues and concerns raised and to create a collaborative, comprehensive, and open process for the community, Select Board, and Planning Board to establish future options and solutions regarding this complex topic.

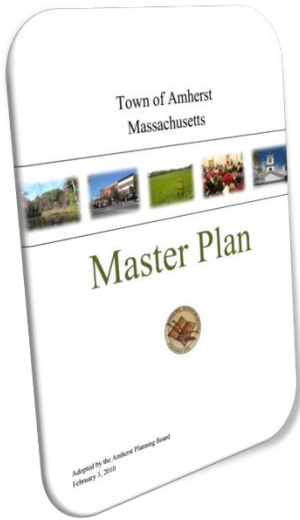
The following components of the existing parking system are outlined herein:

- Master Plan
- 2008 Pioneer Valley Planning Commission Study
- Municipal Parking District
- Town Center Permit parking
- Public off-street metered parking
- Private lots, winter parking, non-metered on-street





# Master Plan



## Overview

The Town of Amherst Master Plan was adopted by the Planning Board on February 3, 2010. The document is described as the community's "blueprint" for the future. It is intended to be the broadest policy document a community can have to guide decision-making on long-term physical development over a period of decades or even generations.

The plan was based on significant public input throughout the planning process which began when Town Meeting voted funds in 2006. The effort was led by the appointed Comprehensive Planning Committee (CPC) with at-large members and others from town committees and civic groups. The CPC worked closely with the national consulting firm of ACP in order to facilitate the process, known as *Planning Amherst Together*, and to develop the draft Master Plan that was presented to the Planning Board for its review and adoption. A link to the wealth of information gathered during *Planning Amherst Together* and the entire Master Plan is here: <http://www.amherstma.gov/526/Master-Plan>

## Chapter 9 of the Master Plan, Transportation and Circulation

The first forum identified those areas of the Master Plan that relate to parking downtown. The forum highlighted many of the objectives or strategies already met through the efforts of Planning Board and others and those that still require implementation. It's important to note that the issues and concerns related to parking downtown are not new and many options and strategies have previously been identified. The Master Plan is an important resource for understanding generally accepted concepts related to parking:

### **T.4.B Adjust existing regulations to help reduce the number of cars in the downtown area.**

- Expand the Municipal Parking District (within which selected uses are exempt from parking requirements) to other areas of the downtown and village centers.
- Remove or reduce parking requirements in the Zoning Bylaw for most residential and commercial development in the downtown area in order to increase density, maximize the area available for residential and commercial development, and create a vital pedestrian atmosphere.
- Increase shared parking and off-site parking for residential and commercial development where applicable, by expanding on existing zoning regulations and pursuing public/private agreements.

### **T.5.C Plan for meeting current and future transportation demand through off-street multi-modal facilities providing a range of services.**

Where appropriate, multi-modal facilities should include such amenities as:

- Automobile parking.
- Public transit/shuttle stops.
- Access to rail transit.
- Pedestrian facilities and directional information.
- Bicycle parking, secure storage, and changing rooms/showers.
- Rentals of bicycles, Zip cars or the like.
- Recharging stations for hybrid/electric vehicles.

### **T.5.A Make changes in parking policies to organize the public parking supply more efficiently.**

- Inventory existing downtown parking to assess current parking patterns, demand, and availability.
- Encourage employers to offer parking permits to employees.
- Restructure metered parking into zones with a tiered fee structure such that the most convenient parking is the most short-term and more expensive than areas further away from downtown.
- Consider applying a progressive price structure to meters with three-hour limits or more.
- Set meter rates so that a minimum percentage (15%?) of parking spaces remains open during peak periods.
- Increase parking revenue by adding meters on Town streets near University of Massachusetts.

### **T.5.B Evaluate existing downtown public and private parking areas for reorganization, management, enhancement, or potential redevelopment as multi-modal facilities, preferably in concert with private mixed-used redevelopment of adjacent streetfront areas.**

Areas to include in this evaluation include, but are not limited to, the Boltwood Walk parking garage, CVS lot, Amity Street lot, parking sites at the north end of downtown, in the interior of the East Pleasant/Triangle/Pray Street block, and the Amherst College alumni parking lot south of Spring Street.

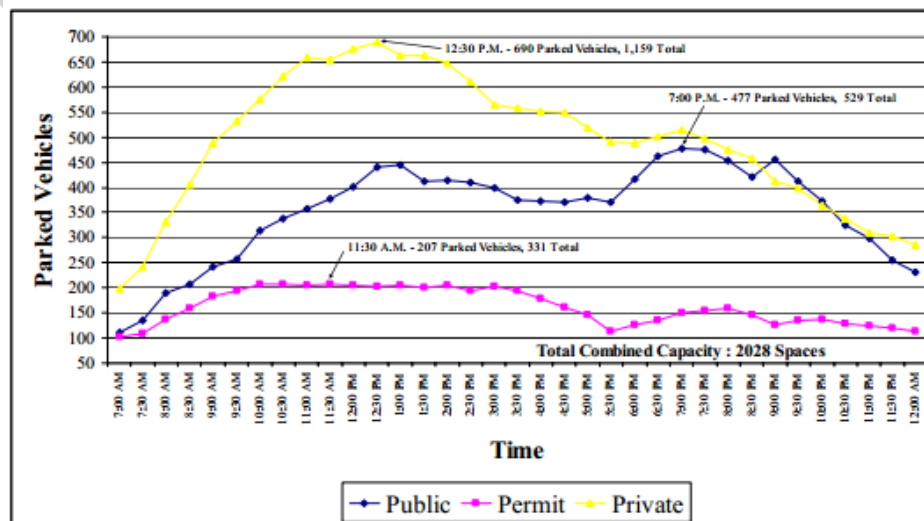
# 2008 Pioneer Valley Planning Commission Parking Study (page 1 of 2)

## Overview

In July of 2008, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission completed a report which includes a parking inventory (information on the number of parking spaces, their location, time restrictions, and type of parking facility), accumulation checks (the total number of vehicles parked at any given time and hourly variations and peak parking demand), and turnover rates (the amount of time a vehicle occupies a specific parking space). The completion of this study implemented one of the early identified strategies of the Comprehensive Planning Committee as part of the Master Plan process.

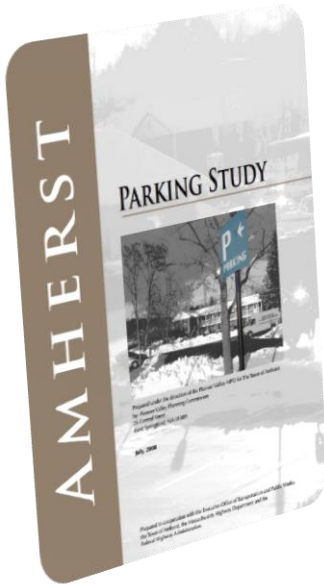
The inventory identified a total of 2,019 parking spaces in the downtown study area. This includes 538 public parking spaces (including on-street meters and public lots), 331 permit parking spaces, and 1,159 private parking spaces. The report notes that the total number of private spaces exceeds the combined total of the public parking and permit parking spaces.

The study identifies the parking usage data for public, private, and permit parking. It finds that private parking is highly utilized within the study area throughout the average work day. However, public parking increases in usage toward the evening hours and permit parking varies slightly throughout the day. The following chart (Figure III-2 of the 2008 Study) illustrates the peak demand and maximum occupancy information for each parking type:





# 2008 Pioneer Valley Planning Commission Parking Study (page 2 of 2)



## Conclusion

The study includes the following conclusions:

- “Data collected suggests that the current parking supply in the downtown area sufficiently meets the current parking demand” [as of 2008]
- “Peak parking demands typically occur during the early afternoon hours”
- “Lots 44, 46, 54, 68, and 78 meet or exceed 100% utilization during the data collection period, however, many other parking areas fail to exceed 50% utilization rates” [LIST LOTS BY NAME]
- “The southern region of the study area is where the highest concentration of public parking facilities are located”
- “The northern region is primarily comprised of private parking lots servicing various retail stores, banks, and restaurants”
- “Public parking lot 15 (Pray Street) is utilized only after the surrounding private lots have reached maximum utilization”

## Recommendations

The following is a summary of the recommendations. Where applicable, the recommendations have also been referenced and incorporated into Chapter 4, Strategies and Recommendations:

### Pray Street public lot

- Consider measures to enforce adjacent private parking
- Allow long term parking

### CVS public lot and private lot

- Improve designation of public/private lots & signs
- Joint Use Agreement w/CVS
- Municipal Permit parking

### Amity Street public lot

- Consider Use Agreement/purchase of Bank of America lot
- Remove curb and allow access between lots

### Public awareness campaign

- Highlight preferred areas, dangers of parking in private lots, overflow parking areas
- Meter feeding
- Short term issuance of warnings; long term issuance of citations intended to encourage use of permit areas

### Long term parking

- Consider additional long term parking in lots 59, 60 and 88.
- Color coded meters & concentrate in central area

### Overflow parking signs

- Implement signage to direct patrons to free parking times on weekends or special events

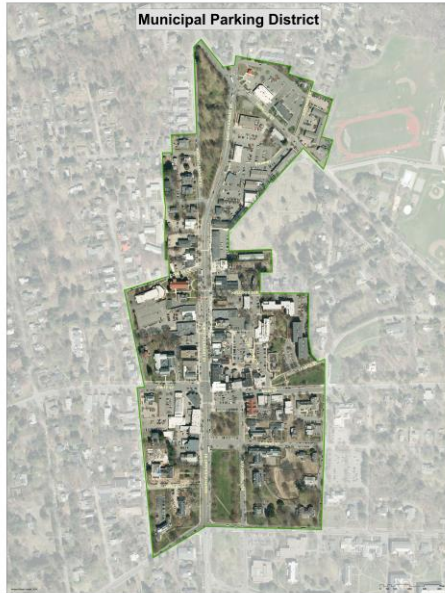
### Parking use agreements

- Consider approaching owners of underutilized private lots to develop an agreement to allow additional public parking
- Advantage include ability to increase parking enforcement
- Create designated overflow parking
- Reduce illegal parking in provide lots by providing additional public parking

### Future development

- Changes in land use or future development in the downtown area could require the need for additional parking.
- Potential new development projects or significant expansion projects should be required to demonstrate how they will accommodate vehicle parking
- Consider opportunities to expand the existing public parking supply (acquisition of private land for use as public parking areas, the development of satellite parking areas for municipal employees and vehicles, and an expansion of the existing permit parking system)

# Municipal Parking District (page 1 of 2)



## *Overview*

First created in the 1960's, and expanded in 1986 and 2009, the Municipal Parking District is a zoning overlay district intended "to encourage the dense development and pedestrian spaces in Amherst Town Center. Toward that end, provision of off-street parking is not required for selected uses within the MP District".

The removal of zoning requirements for certain uses to provide onsite parking is part of the Town's parking system. It involves the availability of public parking for patrons, customers and guests (provided by the Town's on-street meters and public lots). It also involves the availability of parking for employees and residents at the periphery of the downtown area (provided by the Town Center Permit parking areas). This system anticipates and provides different parking options for different end users. It is an essential tool to enable the creation of new restaurants, offices, and dwelling units to occur and create vibrancy and accommodate pedestrians in the downtown area.

The success of downtown is contingent upon the ability for new establishments to open and buildings to be built that rely on and utilize public parking and permit parking. A quick examination of a fairly typical downtown building finds that this 12 unit building with five commercial spaces (two retail and three restaurants) would require approximately 51 parking spaces on-site were it not for the Municipal Parking District. (1,400 sq. ft. retail = 4 parking spaces, 12 units = 24 parking spaces, 3 restaurants = 23 spaces)



# Municipal Parking District (page 2 of 2)



## History

**2009** - The area of the Municipal Parking District was expanded to the northern end of downtown in 2009. In part, the Planning Board Report to Town Meeting explains:

*This purpose is consistent with the community's increased emphasis on denser, sustainable development in our centers—the 'village center' concept strongly supported in the community planning process and described in the draft Master Plan. Since the late 1960s, the MPD has supported this policy by relieving selected downtown uses from the requirement to provide parking. This frees up some surface area of downtown properties so that those areas can be covered with buildings or pedestrian uses, instead of parking lots.*

A complete copy of the Planning Board Report to Town Meeting, maps, and minority report are here: [Article 7 Zoning Bylaw - Municipal Parking District Expansion](#)

**2008** - The name of this section was changed from "Municipal Parking Zone" to "Municipal Parking District" and created the area as an overlay district in the Zoning Bylaw. During the development and consideration of this technical correction, several substantial policy issues were raised and ultimately were the impetus for the 2009 expansion. A complete copy of the 2008 Planning Board Report to Town Meeting is here: [Article 27, Municipal Parking District](#)

**1986** – The requirements of the Municipal Parking District (Zone) were amended to exempt residential uses downtown from requiring on-site parking. This change was the culmination of at least two years of study. As described in the Planning Board Report to Town Meeting:

*In June 1984, a Town Center Task Force was appointed to review and make recommendations on development issues in the downtown. The Task Force completed its report with its recommendations in late 1984. One of the major issues the Task Force debated was the loss of residential units in the Town Center. Members believed that it was to the Town's benefit to encourage the retention and/or production of housing. One of the methods to accomplish this would be to reduce obstacles to residential use in the downtown. Both this article (Article 55) and Article 56 [which allowed residential uses by-right in the downtown] are in response to the concerns and recommendations of the Town Center Task Force. The Downtown Subcommittee of the Planning Board has spent the past six months also discussion downtown issues. The subcommittee has used the Final Report of the Task Force as a starting point in its discussions. Therefore, these two Articles are the first steps in addressing downtown issues.*

A complete copy of the Planning Board Report to Town Meeting is here: [1986 Report to Town Meeting](#)

# Town Center Permit parking



[Overview](#)

DRAFT

# Public Off-Street metered parking

*Overview*

DRAFT



# Private lots

*Overview*

DRAFT

# Winter parking & Non-metered on-street parking

*Overview*

DRAFT

# Public comment/input

As part of Forum One, nearly two hours of public comment and input were received. The following is an illustration of the ideas and issues raised. A copy of the scribed notes and a link to the video of the entire forum are included as appendices.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parking as an integrated system</li> <li>One person or office within the Town should lead the parking process</li> <li>Differential rates for places and times depending on desirability</li> <li>"Meter feeding" by businesses is an issue</li> <li>Need to better regulate and enforce meter feeding</li> <li>Additional space in the Boltwood parking garage should be pursued</li> <li>Parking should be predictable</li> <li>Visitors who are unfamiliar with the town need to be able to find parking</li> <li>People often need parking spaces for more than 3 hours</li> <li>Appreciation for the Northampton parking garage system where you pay when you leave</li> <li>Customers complain of lack of spaces—studies the town has commissioned may say there's enough space, but spaces are not available, predictable, or easy to find</li> <li>New downtown developments with lots of bedrooms but no parking could lead to crisis</li> <li>Signage to the "CVS lot" should be more effective</li> <li>Ability to waive parking requirements as part of project permitting process can be a problem</li> <li>Parking should be built at the developer's expense</li> <li>Parking should be required for downtown residences in the Municipal Parking District</li> <li>Lack of enforcement of the winter parking regulations leads to fewer spaces and narrower driving lanes</li> <li>Make dataset on parking enforcement available on the parking forum website, because where there are many tickets could illuminate where there's heavy demand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spaces should be demarcated with lines so correct number of cars park on street</li> <li>Parking should be part of larger discussion of what downtown should be like, parking can't be a separate issue because they are intertwined</li> <li>Downtown "tall not sprawl", room to grow upwards</li> <li>Density equals economic growth</li> <li>Appreciation for the parking system at the Northampton parking garage</li> <li>End time for paying in each parking lot should be clear</li> <li>Parking permit system works well</li> <li>Appreciation for Northampton parking garage whereas Amherst garage a failure because lots of money spent for few spaces</li> <li>There is competition for handicap accessible spaces and any discussion on parking should include the elderly and handicapped</li> <li>New developments could include underground parking garages</li> <li>Support for growing Boltwood garage</li> <li>Should look for technological fixes to connect open spaces to people needing spaces</li> <li>The choice of two lots side-by-side behind CVS where one is pay and one is free means people choose the free side</li> <li>Parking component of vibrant downtown, but stores, places, etc. are more important</li> <li>Not enough spaces considering growth in number of seats at restaurants</li> <li>New development takes spaces rather than increasing the number of spaces</li> <li>Support for growing the Boltwood garage and using the CVS lot for a parking garage</li> <li>Concern about the length of the parking forum process—why will the next meeting not be until January?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parking is difficult for visitors to figure out</li> <li>5 hour meter spaces are not well-publicized</li> <li>Whatever the parking system the focus should be clarity</li> <li>Redistribution of town permitting spaces should be considered</li> <li>There should be more dual use spaces: meters and permits</li> <li>Boltwood is the more preferable location for a garage because already paid to make it buildable vertically</li> <li>Town center is important as a community focal point</li> <li>Amherst receives many visitors from neighboring towns that don't have town centers</li> <li>Parking management should have more citizen input, maybe it's time to revive the Parking Commission</li> <li>Finding spaces is difficult for newcomers, need better, more clear signage</li> <li>Municipal Parking District can be in conflict with infill development and this should be worked on</li> <li>Boltwood garage was insufficient at the time it was built</li> <li>Inexpensive parking would attract long term campus parkers</li> <li>Uniqueness of downtown important especially to visitors</li> <li>Make bicycling an option by improving safety for cyclists</li> <li>Clearer signage regarding the rules of the road for cyclists, pedestrians, and cars</li> <li>Pedestrian-friendly downtown should be encouraged</li> <li>Support for garage that doesn't detract from feel of town</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Impressed by car-free downtowns and pedestrian boulevards</li> <li>Support for Municipal Parking District, but need more publicly funded parking options to accompany the MPD</li> <li>Density is important to preserve open space</li> <li>Support for improving clarity of parking signage</li> <li>Parallel parking may not be best use of space, in Northampton they have diagonal parking spaces which can help narrow the road and slow traffic</li> <li>Safety of roads to help cyclists, like filling potholes</li> <li>Improving public transit to decrease cars</li> <li>Allowing rental-adjacent parcels to rent parking space</li> <li>Not providing parking at new developments decreases livability of surrounding neighborhoods</li> <li>Missing aspect of Municipal Parking District and ability to waive parking is that development beyond certain point should have to pay for parking</li> <li>Comparison to Northampton isn't apt because a lot more commercial space there</li> <li>New development could negatively impact nearby private lots</li> <li>Events cause problems with parking because locals can't get spaces and there's no such thing as "secret spaces"</li> <li>Building up Boltwood won't add enough space</li> <li>One main thoroughfare in town means pedestrian boulevards are not feasible in Amherst</li> <li>Should use technology to help with parking</li> <li>Private lots should be made public</li> </ul>
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## MORE SUMMARY TEXT ON IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC INPUT & KEY FINDINGS:

- Make parking more predictable/review meter rates
- Create more parking supply
- Enhance parking signage
- Review/change existing regulations
- Enforcement and management of existing supply
- Need for updated data on inventory and demand

End time for paying in ea. lot should be clear

Parking permit sys. works well

Appreciation for Notts garage, failure of Amherst garage because lots of \$ but few spaces

Parking garage in "CVS" lot should be pursued

Competition for HCA spaces—should think of elderly and handicapped in parking discussion

Underground parking garages at new developments

Support for growing Boltwood garage

Looking for technological fixes to connect open spaces to people needing spaces







# Chapter 2 – Parking Forum Two

January 20, 2015

The second in a series of forums co-sponsored by the Select Board and Planning Board and hosted by the Planning Department was held on January 20, 2015 at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst.

The goals for the second forum were to:

- Identify and review all the issues, concerns, and information gathered
- Begin to group these items into categories
- Outline and identify preliminary goals and strategies for major issues
- Allow community members, business owners, Board members, and others to help identify, rank, and prioritize action items

Metering/Rates	New Parking Supply	Signs/Education	Review/change regulations	Enforcement/Management	General/Broad concepts
					
Create different rates depending on location	Review/consider whether a new parking facility is needed; whether developers should provide parking	Parking is hard for visitors to find	Review/revise Municipal Parking District	Review/consider management of private lots	Existing data from 2008 may be outdated
Deter/prohibit meter feeding	Review/consider creation of a new parking facility	Signs for some public and private lots are hard to find and confusing	Review/revise Town Center Permit system	Re-establish the Parking Commission	What kind of downtown do we want?
Use new technology/smart phone app	Review/consider adding to Boltwood Garage	Promote use of Town Center Permit spots after 5:00 p.m.	Review/revise winter parking ban	Create a designated parking official	Consider parking is an integrated system
Make payment more predictable/pay when leaving	Review/consider expanding Town Center Permit areas	Better identify long-term and short term parking meters	Review/revise current on-street parking regulations	Lack of enforcement of winter parking ban	Parking is important to success of downtown

The format for the second forum consisted of an extensive presentation of the summary and initial issues, strategies, and options to begin to look at parking downtown. The goal of the presentation and groupings was to begin to identify actions that could be considered short term, mid-term, and long term and to preliminarily identify regulatory authority and/or Town department (s) involved. This forum also included time for public input.

The chart above was prepared after the first forum and in advance of the second forum and arranges the information into groups and categories and was the basis for the information presented.

Also, at the beginning of the forum, it was identified that the Town was in the process of completing a draft Town-wide Transportation Plan with the assistance of Nelson/Nygaard which would help further explore some of the transportation issues town wide as well as downtown. Unfortunately, it was also identified that the grant monies from the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development had been cut from Governor Baker's budget - unfortunately eliminating a possible state funding source for the Town to create a parking demand management plan.



# Metering/Rates

*Summary of Issues*

DRAFT



# Signs & Education

*Summary of Issues*

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# Regulations

## *Summary of Issues*

Needs formatting, final text

Outline:

### Zoning Bylaw

- Municipal Parking District

- Permitting requirements for parking facilities

- Shared/leased parking/Parking Use Agreements

### Town Center Permits

- Explore areas for expansion

- Discourage/eliminate meter feeding

- Stripe all spaces

- Review winter snow removal policy

- Review use/efficacy of residential only permit areas near campus

### Winter Parking Ban

- Possibility for pilot program for overnight winter parking

- Make system more suitable for residential users

- Review what other communities do

### Off-street parking

- Consider evaluation of periphery streets

- Review overnight parking restriction

# New Parking Facility

## *Summary of Issues*

Needs formatting and final text

Outline:

History

1985 Town Center study

1986 Municipal Parking District change

1989/1990 Facilities Study

1997 Parking garage process begins

2000 Town Center Permit system created

2001 Planning Board approved Parking Garage

2003 Boltwood Garage opens

2008 PVPC study completed

2010 Master Plan adopted

2013/2015 New development occurs

2015

Forum process

Transportation Plan

Growth of businesses and residential uses

Amherst Cinema

Jones Library

Restaurants/retail

Residential Units

Outline concerns/opposition

Grant Opportunity (identified in January; pulled from State budget in February)

Transportation Plan may inform needs assessment

May require Task Force or similar

Evaluate potential locations; CVS lot, second level on Boltwood, Amity Street lot, Amherst College Alumni Lot

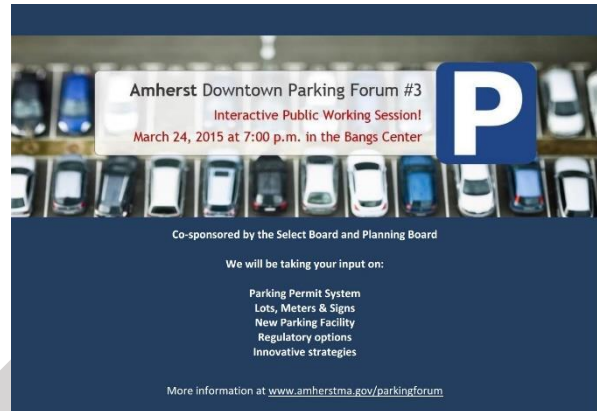
Identify broad concepts – what kind of downtown do we want; consideration of new trends; anticipate future needs; Amherst as a destination

# Chapter 3 – Parking Forum Three

March 24, 2015

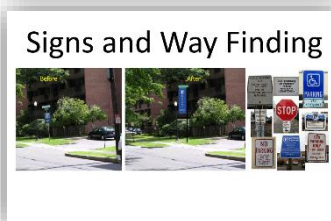
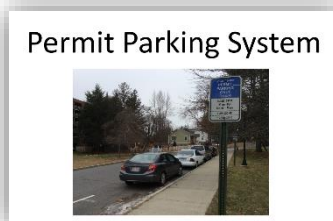
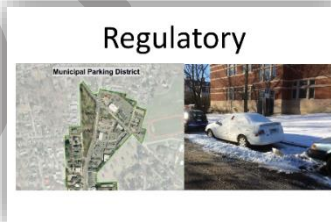
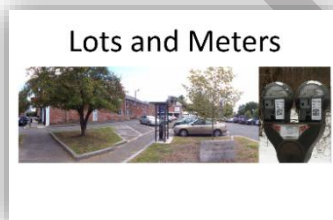
The third in a series of forums co-sponsored by the Select Board and Planning Board and hosted by the Planning Department was held on March 24, 2015 in the Bangs Community Center.

The format of the third forum was changed to create a more participatory event and create an opportunity to gather opinions and/or support for certain options and strategies. The event was broken down into three activities.



*Activity one* - Involved participants identifying on a map of the downtown where they park to get to certain destinations. The purpose of the activity was to help map and assess where people park in proximity to where they are going. The mapping results from this exercise are included as an appendix.

*Activity two* - Involved participants rotating around the room to six topic stations. At each topic station a member of the Planning Board or Select Board acted as a facilitator and scribed notes of comments, ideas, suggestions or concerns at each station. After approximately 40 minutes, the facilitator reported out to the larger audience a summary of the activity.



*Activity three* - The final exercise involved the completion of individual ranking sheets which asked participants to rank 14 strategies which were refined based on a basic understanding of the current parking system and the public input collected in forum 1 and forum 2. Participants also discussed their rankings in small groups and a representative from each table reported out to the larger audience the top three priorities of their respective tables.

The following is the Individual Ranking Form completed by participants, which was also available on-line for two weeks after the forum (the results are found in Chapter 4):

PARKING FORUM # 3	
March 24, 2015	
Exercise 3: INDIVIDUAL RANKING FORM	
Name (optional) _____	
For each question below, select the option that best fits your opinion on the importance of the issue.	
Question	Choose an item.
Review snow removal policy for downtown parking	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Review/revise Municipal Parking District requirements	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Explore ways to expand Town Center Permit system	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Re-establish Parking Commission or similar	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Begin planning process for new parking facility now	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Update parking data	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
SEE OVER →	
Develop pilot program for overnight winter parking	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Improve signs for public lots	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Promote use of Town Center Permit parking after 5:00 p.m.	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Evaluate regulations for streets near downtown	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Create a Special Event parking program	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Consider different fees for metered parking	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Make payment simpler and more predictable	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Review smart technologies/app's	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
OTHER COMMENTS, IDEAS, INPUT	



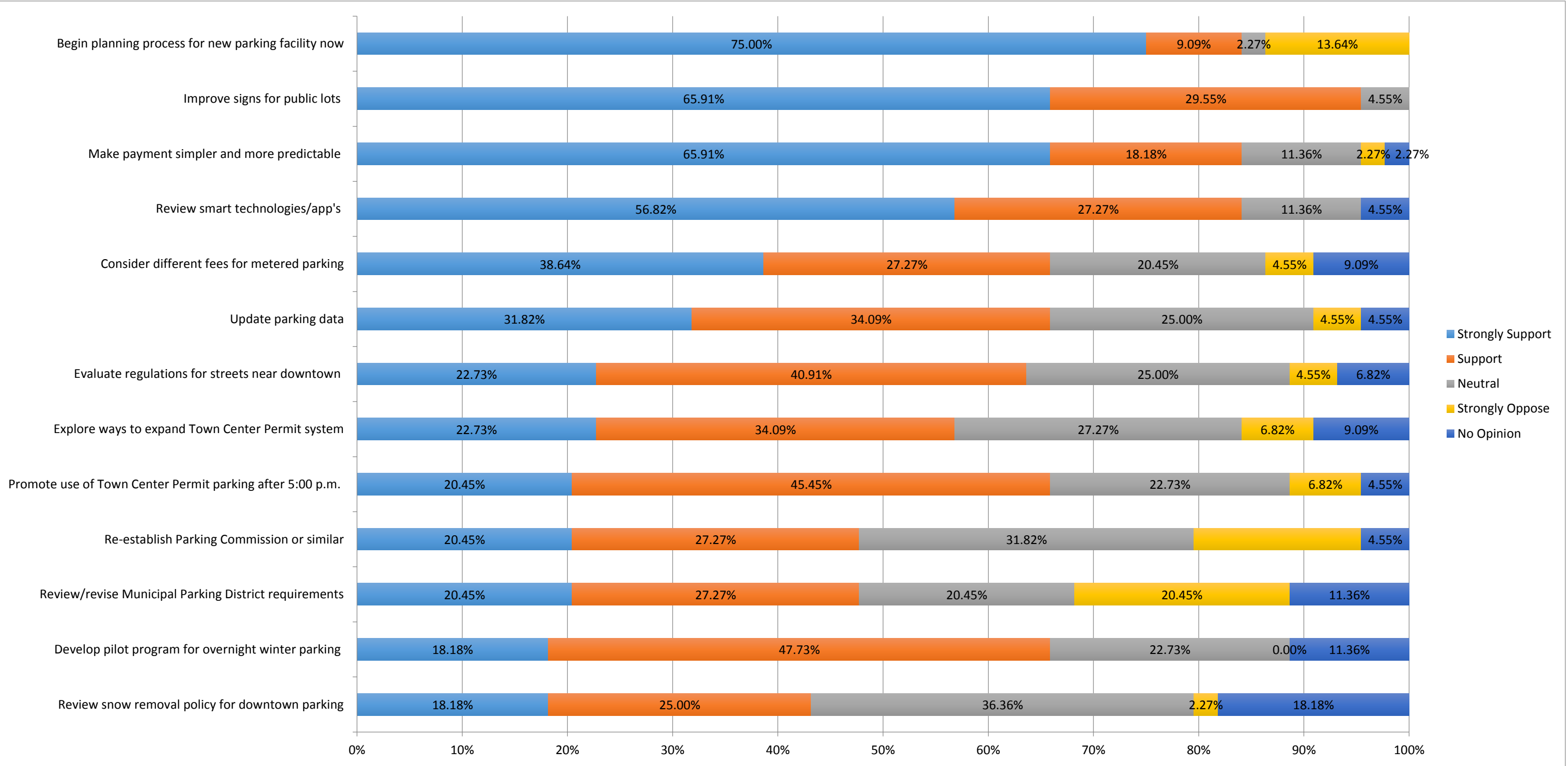


## Chapter 4 – Strategies and Recommendations



# Community Priorities Identified By Forum Participants

The following chart shows the results of the Individual Ranking Sheet completed by participants of the third parking forum on March 24, 2015



# Begin planning process for new parking facility now (page 1 of 2)

## *Issues*

Input from various stakeholders, residents, and participants of the parking forum included many observations and concerns related to the need for additional public parking in downtown Amherst. The forums have provided some anecdotal data suggesting the need for the Town to explore and pursue the creation of a new parking facility downtown. Many of the comments received relate to the need for additional parking to foster new business and residential growth. Entities such as the Jones Library, Amherst Cinema, the BID, Chamber of Commerce, and business owners have identified that additional parking is critical for their customers and to sustain a vibrant and relevant downtown.

The forums have indicated support for beginning a planning process to explore the need for and feasibility of a new parking facility. Neither the forums nor this report provide an outline or identify the exact planning process. The forums and report do, however, identify that beginning a planning process is a priority along with pursuing strategies to assess and enhance the existing parking supply and management.

## *Action items*

Consider creating a Task Force to evaluate and determine appropriate next steps, including but not limited to:

- An evaluation of possible sites
- Ability or benefit of preparing a RFP
- To engage a consultant to prepare an updated parking inventory, utilization study, and to determine how best to maximize the use of existing parking supply
- Prepare a cost/benefit analysis and review of tax implication
- Review and discuss the 1990 Facilities Study
- Review and discuss the before and after conditions associated with the Boltwood Garage

## PARKING FORUM INPUT

### MORE INFO

Amherst Cinema

Jones Library

BID/Chamber

Etc.

## MASTER PLAN (2010)

## 1990 FACILITIES PLAN

Scope, Process, findings

# Begin planning process for new parking facility now (page 2 of 2)

*Action items (continued)*

DRAFT

# Improve signs for public lots

*Issues*

*Action items*

DRAFT



# Make payment simpler and more predictable

*Issues*

*Action items*

DRAFT

# Review smart technologies/app's

*Issues*

*Action items*

DRAFT

# Consider different fees for metered parking

*Issues*

*Action items*

DRAFT

# Update parking data

## *Issues*

In 2008, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission conducted a parking study for the downtown area of the Town of Amherst. In part, a conclusion of the study suggested that the current, as of 2008, parking supply sufficiently meets the demand. It identified that several parking lots had utilization rates over 100% while many others failed to exceed 50% utilization rates. It provided a series of recommendations to improve the efficiency of parking in the downtown area.

However, since 2008 there have been a series of changes in the downtown area causing the Town to re-visit the question of whether the amount of parking downtown is adequate.

Extensive growth in existing businesses, specifically, restaurants, combined with some reductions in the overall supply has heightened the sense that parking demand often exceeds supply in the most desirable and easily accessed areas. In addition, the growth and expansion of a key downtown landmark, Amherst Cinema, has highlighted the problems centered on a lack of parking in key locations. The potential shortage of parking has also been identified as a prohibitive factor in the future growth and expansion of the heavily used Jones Library in the heart of downtown. Business owners and some residents believe that parking demand now outweighs supply during peak times. Finally, recently approved residential development, expected to add up to 120 dwelling units (with more development possible), are not required to provide parking on-site.

## *Action items*

The growth of existing businesses, the increase in the number of units downtown, and the large number of visitors on evenings, weekends, special events, and at the beginning and end of college semesters contribute to the need for Amherst to obtain an updated parking inventory, utilization data (supply and demand), to review demand management strategies, and to consider whether the construction of a new parking facility would benefit the downtown.

## PARKING FORUM INPUT

The individual ranking sheet completed as an exercise at the third parking forum indicates that obtaining updated data on parking – in terms of an updated inventory and utilization rates - would be strongly supported.

## TRANSPORTATION PLAN RECOMMENDATION

Parking Utilization Data Program – Parking utilization data measures the level of demand for parking in an area or municipality. Utilization counts are conducted in particular areas for both on-street and off-street public and private parking and provide a measure of how many spaces are used at a given time. Utilization data allows for informed decisions to be made about parking by demonstrating where the greatest and least demand for parking is in a particular area. Data also can be used to more-accurately model future demand based on actual performance

## MASTER PLAN

Strategy T.5.A – Make changes in parking policies to organize the public parking supply more efficiently.

Inventory existing downtown parking to assess current parking patterns, demand, and availability.

# Evaluate parking regulations for streets near downtown

## *Issues*

Several streets on the periphery of the downtown are used by employees, student commuters, and others. In some cases, the use as on-street parking may be acceptable, in other cases, the street may not be suitable for parking and/or create a hazard for pedestrians or property vehicular movement, especially for emergency vehicles. The existing Parking Rules and Orders include a list of streets where parking is either restricted or prohibited. For all other streets, on-street parking may be allowed and may be unregulated. Due to the pressure and demand for parking, the periphery streets should be evaluated to determine whether the regulations for certain streets should be changed. For example, some streets may require restrictions and others may lend themselves to permit parking. The Select Board recently undertook a review of on street parking occurring on High Street which was causing a potential safety concern.

## *Action items*

The regulations associated with certain streets should be evaluated for effectiveness and viability. Decisions should be made whether parking is appropriate and how best to regulate it (such as through creation of permit parking) or restricted by signs and enforcement where public safety issues exist.

The following are examples of streets that should be evaluated:

Lincoln Avenue (North and South in the proximity to Amity Street)

Webster Street

Taylor Street

Brigham Street

High Street

# Explore ways to expand the Town Center Permit system

*Issues*

*Action items*

DRAFT



# Promote use of Town Center Permit parking after 5:00 p.m.

*Issues*

*Action items*

DRAFT

# Re-establish a Parking Commission, Task Force, or similar group

## *Issue*

The issues related to downtown parking are complex, involve multiple property owners and stakeholders, and are intertwined with various regulations controlled by different authorities. . Creating significant changes to one set of regulations could result in unintended consequences. Additionally, gathering and understanding the often disparate needs and requirements of the involved stakeholders, residents, and Town officials warrants the re-establishment of a group charged with considering changes to Amherst's downtown parking regulations.

## *Action items*

Following the success of the Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods Working Group and the Town-Gown Steering Committee, the creation of a body comprised of Town staff, residents, business owners and /or stakeholders has proved to create a beneficial public process.

# Review/revise Municipal Parking District requirements (page 1 of 2)

## *Issues*

Parking requirements and regulations governing the Municipal Parking District (MPD) need to be re-examined in response to new development, the results of the parking forums, Transportation Plan recommendations, and referral of citizen parking petition amendments back to the Planning Board.

## *Action items*

There is a need to evaluate how parking is regulated in the MPD and contribute to the success of downtown Amherst. The review of the Municipal Parking District is confined to the Zoning Bylaw and would therefore be reviewed by the Planning Board. Any resulting change to the Zoning Bylaw must be approved by 2/3 vote of Amherst Town Meeting.

Discussion of the Municipal Parking District has taken place in the past, although it was delayed to allow for the parking forums and Transportation Plan to allow a more open and comprehensive process. Previously identified options that require vetting, review, definitions, and testing include:

- Parking space requirements
- Fees-in-lieu
- Shared or leased parking
- Shared-car or bike use
- Off-site parking
- Design criteria for off-street parking facilities.

# Review/revise Municipal Parking District requirements (page 2 of 2)

## *Action items (continued)*

After examining the options, consideration should be given to how or if proposed changes relate to or impact non-zoning options or measures. For example, the recently completed (April 2015) Transportation Plan and the parking forums have identified several non-zoning options including:

- Demand-Based Pricing
- Special Event Management
- Parking Benefit District

During the assessment the Town should also begin discussions with stakeholders, including residents, property owners, and others to learn their perspective.

The need for an updated parking inventory, utilization study, and management recommendations is discussed in another section.

# Develop pilot program for overnight winter parking

## *Issue*

The two areas available for overnight parking in the winter are the public Pray Street lot and the lower level of the parking garage. The available spaces are less than the demand and the proximity of those spaces to residential units is often too far to create proper utilization.

## *Action item*

Consider a pilot winter overnight parking arrangement in the underutilized portion of the CVS lot or an agreed upon street. A pilot program in coordination with the DPW and with proper education and participation from Permit users could help examine options, identify difficulties, and inform future decisions.

# Review the winter parking ban in the Town Center Permit areas

## *Issue*

The existing Town Center Permit Regulations allow permit holders to park overnight between April and November 30<sup>th</sup>. However, parking overnight is prohibited from December 1 through April 1<sup>st</sup> where residents, in particular, must find alternate arrangements. The two areas available for overnight parking in the winter are the public Pray Street lot and the lower level of the parking garage. The available spaces are less than the demand and the proximity of those spaces to residential units is often too far to create proper utilization. Finally, the enforcement of the overnight winter parking ban has been identified as inconsistent causing confusion amongst users, opportunities for parking overnight despite the prohibition, and no accurate data on how many users use the designated areas.

## *Action item*

1. Review and consider the current purpose and need for the winter parking ban. Evaluate and compare the current policy to winter parking policies of other comparable cities or Towns. Northampton and Worcester both utilize a system whereby parking is prohibited on-street during identified snow emergencies, rather than a prohibition throughout the entire winter. Other communities utilize an alternate side of the street system whereby parked vehicles are required to move at intervals to allow clearing of snow.
2. Consider whether the existing or proposed winter parking regulations will encourage or discourage additional residential uses downtown.
3. If no solutions are found to be viable, the full enforcement of the winter parking ban should be implemented. This would include follow through on ticketing and requiring permit holders to use the two designated parking areas. If enforced, it could be monitored and evaluated for effectiveness



## Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Next Steps



# Appendices

Transportation Plan (2015)  
Master Plan (2010)  
Municipal Parking District expansion, 2009  
    PB Report To Town Meeting  
    PB maps  
    Town Meeting video  
PVPC Parking Study (2008)  
Parking Forum One  
    Slideshow  
    Video  
    Public Comment Notes  
    Letters submitted  
Parking Forum Two  
    Slideshow  
    Video  
    Public Comment Notes  
Parking Forum Three  
    Video  
    Where Do You Park Activity  
    Activity Station Notes  
    Individual Ranking Sheet  
Online Comments From All Three Parking Forums

DRAFT